

Fadlallah, the Maronite

Lebanon



M.H. FADLALLAH: SHAKING UP THE LEBANESE SYSTEM

By Amal Fadlallah

The Lebanese political status quo should "have a 'shock' to confront the petrification of the Lebanese formula, which insists that the president of the republic should be a Maronite," the prominent Lebanese Moslem religious leader Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah told *Monday Morning* last week as Lebanon's presidential race was beginning in earnest. "Let us face this shock... Let the people be accustomed to living in the wide space of liberty and openness to the future,"

he said, rejecting what he called "political Maronitism", which he described as "a project to implement the ambitions of those (who seek to impose) a Maronite ascendancy" on Lebanon.

Had he a Moslem candidate in mind for the presidency?

"I have said that I support a Moslem who believes in my ideas, not one who doesn't," he replied. However, he added, he had no particular person in mind since "I know that the sole elector (in the August presiden-

tial vote) will be the United States."

Sayyed Fadlallah -- who is said to be close to the Hezbollah (Party of God) grouping -- spoke of his views on the role of Islam as a political concept in the context of the Lebanese polity, which is characterized by diversity of opinions and openness of expression.

He pointed out that the Lebanese system had room for a Communist Party which "calls for the formation of a Marxist state," and a Baathist party "that advocates formation of a Baathist socialist state... why then is the proposal of an Islamic state so frightening when that of a Marxist state is not so?"

There was no question of imposing Islam by force, he said, "but we do propose it as a concept and a political way that will stir opposition or support and will initiate dialogue. If people accept this way, it will solve their problem. If not, it will remain on the scene of struggle as other concepts are."

Sayyed Fadlallah held out no hope of any quick solution to the Lebanese crisis, optimistic forecasts to the contrary by others notwithstanding. The problem, he suggested, was "that Lebanon is doomed to be an unstable country always vacillating between partition and unity, but not being partitioned, a country whose collapse is prevented by others who, however, do not want it to be stable."

"Therefore," he said, "there might be tactical moves to convince the people that something has taken place after the election of the new president, but the problems will still remain even if some easing of tension is felt." Instrumental in the persistence of these problems, he said, was the fact of Lebanon's regional position and the activity in it of "various intelligence and political spheres."

Had he any ideas on why the seizure of foreign hostages had ceased, we asked.

In view of the "roots of the issue" and its relationship to "political stands," he said, "I do not think there

We are ready to cooperate with everybody, but we are fulfilling the wishes and projects of Saudi Arabia in this respect, for a basic reason, namely that Saudi Arabia is the most generous country which donates for Lebanon, so far.

Where will the following plans be?

The southern suburbs. We met with associations in the southern suburb, and were welcomed. The associations expressed their desire to apply the same method that was applied in West Beirut.

And the following step?

We shall start in the southern suburbs and the Bekaa at the same time, and after 20 days we hope to move to East Beirut and North Lebanon.

Are there contacts or coordination with associations or committees in the eastern sector to study the means of distribution?

We are holding the necessary contacts for this purpose and are being welcomed.

Will these aid be periodic, or just for one time?

This is not the first time that Saudi Arabia donates aid to Lebanon, and am sure it will not be the last time. The Saudis definitely feel the great gratitude of the Lebanese to their assistance and consequently they will respond to the needs of the Lebanese in these difficult times.

Moving to the political aspect, many reports discussed a project by Sheikh Rafik Hariri for a solution to the Lebanese crisis, while certain political sides denied such a project. How far is this true?

I do not know that Rafik Hariri submitted projects, except for the reconstruction of Lebanon.

How do you describe the phase that separates us from the presidential election?

According to me it is definitely difficult.

From which aspect?

The economic crisis which we are witnessing and the daily-living conditions are very bad. Many of the

Lebanese live on the remainder of their savings in the bank. There is the money transferred by Lebanese working abroad, but how much they are sufficient, we do not know.

Production has dropped exceedingly in all sectors. I do not know for how long will the economy in Lebanon can stand firm. Some say that production will increase along with the drop in the value of the pound, but I don't think this could be taken as a rule. The economic development starts with a political solution, and not in any other way.

Do you see in the horizon any political solution?

The vision is bad.

Do you expect further economic collapse?

I know that there is a crisis which the people are facing, and I live with the needy people, in spite of my job in the Hariri Foundation, I share the poor people their sufferings. We are transformed into a begging people, but there are some who refuse to beg. The security situation left nothing for the Lebanese except begging. Those who object to begging, should first object to the civil war which is the major problem of the people.

Many people live on the garbage piles, can we leave them as such, we will be blamed for not helping them.

As for the reaction of the people, I have worked on a number of important and great projects. I used to believe that nothing would be as important as the reconstruction of Beirut, following the Israeli invasion and the establishment of Hariri Foundation. But the reaction of the people proved to me something really important, the people were extremely pleased with these aid, to an extent that proved how much the people were in dire need for the daily-living requests. You cannot imagine how the people's reaction was towards us.

Do the committees in charge of distribution, brief you on the details of their activities?

We have an operation room which

submits daily reports about the shares distributed every day, and we hold a general meeting each day.

What is your plan in this respect?

We formed teams for each quarter, in fact there are 35 teams for the distribution of the coupons and 35 teams for the distribution of shares. On the first day we distribute the coupons to the houses, and on the second day we distribute the shares according to the coupons.

Is there coordination between the distribution of coupons and the shares schedule?

There are supervising schedules, but the basic issue is the coupon.

In case one of the members who distributes coupons gave more than one coupon to a house, how can you control this violation?

We can control this. Similar incidents took place in certain quarters, and we found out that the number of houses and the number of coupons were not harmonious; distribution was halted and after the meeting of the inhabitants of that quarter, we found out that there was one person carrying two coupons. So far we have distributed 70,000 shares. There is effective harmony between the shares and the coupons, by a hundred percent.

Therefore, there is control between the coupons and the schedule, and between the coupons and the number of shares. Is the control undertaken by you or by the committee?

In principle, each coupon is given by a number of persons, so is the case with respect to the distribution of shares. The people are not ready to free play, because they are very much concerned for the success of the project. The method adopted in conforming the shares to the coupons is submitted to self-control.

Would you like to add anything?

I would like to extend my thanks to the Saudi monarch King Fahd for his donation to the Lebanese people, such a donation has a wonderful echo among the people of Lebanon.

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is a new position that will tempt the (further) use of such a method."

Turning to the wider regional scene, Sayyed Fadlallah deplored the "crushed and scared mentality" with which the two superpowers and their activity are viewed by Middle Eastern people, who however had a potent means of influencing the actions of Moscow and Washington, if they but knew it. The peoples of the region, he said, "maintain their potentialities in transforming their points of weakness into points of power. Power is not only in the hands of the powerful."

In this context he welcomed the revolt by Palestinians that began in the Israeli-occupied territories last month. "Let the uprising prove its authenticity, posing a danger to all around it and threatening all compromises," he said, and added: "The uprising proves that all means of oppression have failed and that there is a new confidence witnessed and enjoyed by the Moslems in facing Zionism and imperialism." He only regretted that the rising was "being contained by the Arabs in order to prevent it from overflowing and from posing a danger to the Israeli presence within the occupied territories."

Here is the translation of the interview, which was conducted in Arabic.

During your discussion with (Lebanese journalist) Michel Abou Jawdeh, you approved the candidacy of MP Raymond Edde for the presidency. Do you still support him? He asked you to meet him outside Lebanon. Do you intend to meet him?

Mr. Abou Jawdeh considered my objective evaluation of the personality of Raymond Edde within the political framework in Lebanon,

as a commitment to his candidacy, although I have confirmed during my discussion that any candidate will be an "American" candidate, if not an employee of U.S. intelligence. It is quite natural that we reject any American-backed president, and this is why I made an objective evaluation of what is going on, on the Lebanese scene.

It was not a declaration of a stand. I have issued a statement clarifying the impressions of Mr. Abou Jawdeh, in view of my commitment to Islam as a political line within which I move. I cannot commit myself to any president who does not share my views.

As for a meeting with Mr. Edde, I welcome any meeting with any political, religious or cultural personality, because I do not believe in closing the door on anyone.

You propose Islam as a political concept, while others interpret it as an introduction to the establishment of an Islamic republic in Lebanon. Lebanon is known for the plurality of its sects. What is your comment?

In Lebanon, people are clever in launching scary ideas, even though they view Lebanon as a country of intellect and civilization. When I propose Islam, I am convinced that Islam is a concept a revealed law and a way of life, which takes into consideration the Moslems and the non-Moslems.

It proposes solutions that find expression in the economic, political, security and penal aspects of Islamic law. I consider my proposal for Islam as a solution to the sectarian problem in Lebanon. When Islam is recognized as a political concept, a revealed law and a way of life, whereby those faithful will start a dialogue with the others,

and when the Christians live Christianity in its true essence as a concept and a religion with ethical values, and when both Christians and Moslem view each other from a reasonable stand point, then they will have many points on which they can meet.

On the other hand, the missionary message of the Christians is to transform all the world into a Christian world, by civilized or uncivilized methods. Why are (Christian) missionary efforts in Africa and Indonesia not considered frightening to the Moslems there? Islam is proposed as a political ideal in a civilized manner that attracts the faithful and calls on the non-believers to accept it. It does not seek to intimidate. The Lebanese look for a method that will govern them while maintaining plurality. But I feel that this plurality is unrealistic, because many of the Moslems and many of the Christians are heretics.

I would like to say that the Christian political establishment agreed to allow the Marxists to have a party which calls for the formation of a Marxist state, and the Baathists to have a party that advocates the formation of an Arab Socialist state, and which in the future will join the idea of Arab unity. It also allowed the Syrian Nationalist Social Party to exist as apolitical ideology although they call for considering Lebanon part of the Syrian national state. Why then is the proposal of an Islamic state frightening when that of a Marxist state is not so? Is Marxism part of Christianity? Does Marxism protect Christianity as Islam protects Christianity? We shall not impose Islam by force, but we do propose it as a concept and a political way that will stir opposition or support and will initiate dialogue. If people accept this method, it will solve their problem. If not, it will remain on the scene of



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struggle as other concepts are.

We would like to tell the Christians and the Moslems that, if we want Lebanon to enjoy freedom, the Moslems should say what they want, and the Christians should say what they want. The future will be for the most effective concept, the most effective means, in regard to political power and all objective circumstances that give power.

Will you tell us more about the meaning of Islam as a political thought?

We set this issue for dialogue. Perhaps we are mistaken in our understanding of this matter. Christianity in its intellectual and religious context does not propose a political line, but believes in separation between religion and politics, in view of the dictum "Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God". It wants to arrange its relations with Caesar in a way to protect its faith and the faith of the people. Christianity does not have a revealed law in its every day context, but (confines its attention to the personal life of the individual). Thus, when Christianity moves in any direction, it will not consider itself an alternative to the political establishment in matters of government. It gives the political atmosphere a religious value and some understanding which speaks of tolerance and love in order to keep politics far from violence. It may move strongly in an indirect or direct manner, according to circumstances, when its presence or freedom of preaching are exposed to danger. It may resort to violence more than others do, and this is known in the history of Christianity, during the struggle among the Christians, or between Christians and heretics, or between Christians and Moslems.

Christianity may propose love, but it may find violence a means for its protection. Islam is a religion that proposes the issue of justice, and sets laws for it in matters of ruling, and the relation between the ruler and the ruled. It proposes the characteristics of the ruler and his relation with his people. It lays down all social, economic and security guidelines that protect the people, and describe justice in detail, making it a lively fact linking the goal to the means. Islam proposes liberty of the human being before the world, and the liberty of the people to revolt against their ruler when he deviates, and the liberty of the ruler to impose order on the people. Thus Islam sets laws for the individual in all aspects of his life. It doesn't specify the Moslem, but stresses all human beings. Islam recognizes "the people of the Book", i.e. Christians and Jews, and sets a basis for dialogue with them, and as is mentioned in the Koran, and also sets basis for co-existence with them within specific conditions.

Many feel troubled about the expression "People who are free non-Moslem subjects living in Moslem countries, who in return for paying the capitation tax, enjoyed protection and safety". This also means that they are under the protection of God, his prophet and of all the Moslems. This allows for more openness and paves the way for a scientific and objective dialogue. For fourteen centuries, we notice that Christians and Jews existed in Islamic countries, and whenever there were problems against the Christians and the Jews, there were also problems against the Moslems themselves. This takes place anywhere and against anyone. The issue would not have culminated in hatred and fear, had we been able to start a calm dialogue with a view to solving the problem. We believe in all the values

preached by the Prophets Issa and Moussa, which are also mentioned and immortalized in the Koran and therefore we cannot but be open to all religions.

What we understand from a statement by you is that you support the candidacy of a Moslem for the presidency. Is this the case?

I have said that I support a Moslem who believes in my ideas, not a Moslem who does not. The existing political status quo should have a "shock" to confront this petrification of the formula which insists that the president of the republic should be a Maronite. Let us face this shock even in a way that may not fulfill all the prerequisites. Let the people be accustomed to live in the wide space of liberty and openness to the future. We think Islamically in an intellectual manner, and not in a sectarian manner. We do not view political Maronitism, (the idea of a Maronite state, in the religious sense of the word, but rather as a political project to implement the ambitions of (those who seek to impose) a Maronite ascendancy.

This means that you do not have a Moslem candidate?

At this point I do not have a Moslem candidate, because I know that the sole elector will be the United States.

What do you say about your nomination as a presidential candidate on behalf of the Islamic Community?

I have heard about this and did not respect it, and I will not discuss this matter in this way. I refuse to raise this issue in the manner presented by this group, because I practice self respect in the method of handling this issue, which is my

We propose Islam as a political concept, one which, like others, will be the object of debate and dialogue

The Islamic Revolution aims to be an alternative to the equations of Marxism and capitalism

nature.

Many people foresee positive developments on the horizon which will be followed by the beginning of a solution to the Lebanese crisis, with the opening of the presidential election campaign. Other people see the contrary. What is your view of the future?

I do not know what these people conceive as positive developments in the situation. Have we reached any result that may separate the Lebanese crisis from the Middle East crisis? Is there an international agreement that will make Lebanon lose its role as a focus for all the problems of the area? Has Lebanon stopped being the place where one can "eavesdrop" on all the region's trends? When all these matters are resolved and all issues closed, and the issue remains only an inter-Lebanese one, then the Moslem-Christian conflict will be easily resolved. The problem is not a problem between Christians and Moslems on the person of the president of the republic, or in the manner of government. The problem is that Lebanon is doomed to be an unstable country in a specific manner, and a country that will always vacillate between partition and unity, but will not be partitioned, a country whose collapse is prevented by others who however do not want it to be stable. Therefore there might be tactical moves to convince the people that some-

thing has taken place after the election of the new president, but the problems will still remain even if some easing in tension is felt.

Your statement means that the forthcoming president will be only a "manager" of the crisis?

I can propose another alternative, namely that the new president will be a president responsible nearly for carrying current business. Everything depends on the circumstances.

Does this mean that you do not see a solution to the Lebanese crisis in the short term or even the long run?

The Lebanese crisis we are facing might find a solution in the nineties, but the Lebanese crisis which is linked to the regional role of Lebanon will remain as long as Lebanon is involved in various intelligence and political spheres.

Why in the nineties?

Because solving the Middle East crisis awaits the results of the election of new presidents in some European countries. It is quite natural that the issue will start in the second year that follows election of a new U.S. president. If there is a scope for an international conference, there might be a solution. In such an event the president of

1994 will be the president who will solve the Lebanese crisis.

Where has the hostage issue reached? When do you think they will be released? Do you think the way in which the French hostages were freed was the right way?

You must ask those who "activate" this matter, since they are not found in Lebanon. I mean that this issue moves in an international sphere where positions are numerous, and I do not mean a specific position.

In your opinion, why has the kidnapping stopped? Is it because there are no more foreigners in Lebanon, or because the policy has changed in this respect?

When we understand the roots of the issue, we will know that it fulfilled its mission in the political stands from which it started. Thus I do not think there is a new position that will tempt the use of such a method.

Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia has said that the Iraqi-Iranian war will end "in 1988". Amidst the current, calm Syrian mediation between Iran and the Gulf states, do you think his statement is valid?

I imagine that the Gulf War is greater than an international issue, and cannot be erased through a

I feel that the uprising in the occupied territories is being contained by the Arabs in order to prevent it from posing a danger to the Israeli presence

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Lebanon is doomed to be an unstable country, vacillating between unity and partition

mediation, with our deep respect to the Syrian role. The Gulf War, I believe, in nature centers on the Islamic Revolution, the aim of which is not to penetrate the Gulf states, but rather to be transformed through Islam into an alternative to one of the two other "equations" which now dominate the world - I mean Marxism and capitalism. Thus I believe that the Gulf War may be more dangerous to imperialism than the Palestinian issue. I can imagine a sort of an armistice, but not a solution unless there are great surprises which may destroy many equations. Iran no longer aspires to be the policeman of the Gulf, as it tried to be under the shah and under U.S. influence. The war can destroy some of the equations, or alternatively, it may cause a rapprochement between them.

Don't you think that the two superpowers are now in a position to put an end to the Gulf War?

I do not think the issue is that critical. They might agree on calming down the war to avoid an explosion which may harm the interests of both. But we must know that the superpowers are not everything. The peoples can be in a position to activate movement by the superpowers and can sabotage some of the courses before them.

We have a crushed and scared mentality regarding the superpowers. We understand that there are certain "equations" in which the superpowers cannot penetrate. This is why the peoples maintain their potentialities in transforming their points of weakness into points of power. Power is not always only in the hands of the powerful.

How do you evaluate the uprising in the Israeli-occupied territories? What are its dimensions and how do you imagine its coming results?

The uprising is a movement by a new generation that is totally independent of any organizational and political backgrounds. It is the result of the sufferings of oppression witnessed by the new generation, who find themselves strangled in their present and their future, and have been able to find in Islam an incentive.

The Palestinian child, youth and woman who stand in front of a tank do not think of the power of the tank, but of the stone that will wound the head of the Israeli soldier and of the knife that will stab the chest and back of the enemy.

Their uprising is an equation that stores a revolution, in spite of the difficult circumstances. I believe that the Arabs were taken by surprise as were international circles. This is why the Arab scene is not able to embrace it. Let the uprising prove its authenticity, posing a danger to all those around it, and threatening all compromises. I feel that the uprising is being contained by the Arabs in order to prevent it from overflowing and from posing a danger to the Israeli presence within the occupied territories. The uprising proves that all means of oppression have failed, and that there is a new confidence witnessed and enjoyed by the Moslems in facing Zionism and imperialism.

How do you see the future of Iran to be in view of your previous answers, namely that there are small states that later be-

came superpowers and vice versa?

In Iran there is a real revolution. I visited Iran two months ago, and found that the people, who sacrificed many victims to war and witnessed the ugliest destruction, are still strong and sincere to the revolution, and are not yet tired. They are determined to continue their struggle in the future.

There are leaders in Iran who respect the people and are frank with the people. Imam Khomeini criticizes the officials if they make mistakes. The government is not unanimously approved by the Consultative Council; each minister must gain confidence. There is real supervision, there are problems, there are points of weakness, there are those who oppose, but the opposition will not shake the atmosphere. Iran is acting on the basis of its Islamic personality and has found in the Islamic world a response, in spite of media propaganda against its role and its form. It possesses power that is growing.

As for its strategic position, this allows it to be free in playing a role in the struggle between the two superpowers. It does not move in the policy of balance. It has a political strategy linked to the individual issue of the strategy of this country or that.

Iran has its borders with the Soviet Union, and forms a problem through the Soviet Moslems. Thus the United States and the Soviet Union cannot venture to fragment Iran. The Iranian people are a people with patience, determination and self-restraint.

The sole elector in the coming Lebanese presidential election will be the United States